L.   Claims

What is claimed is:

1. A method for operating a marketplace for sale of information products between information sellers and information buyers, comprising:

connecting information sellers and buyers to communicate offers and communicate acceptance of offers for sale or purchase of information products;

for a sales or purchase transaction entered into, facilitating at least one transaction payment between the information seller and buyer in such transaction; and

for a transaction at least partly performed, collecting evaluation data from the information seller and information buyer on qualities of interest to future participants in the marketplace who may enter into information product transactions with such information seller and information buyer.

2. The method of claim 1 where the information buyer and information seller in a sales transaction are anonymous to each other and known to a marketplace operator.

3. The method of claim 1 further comprising processing the evaluation data under a weighting scheme and making the weighted evaluation data available to participating sellers and buyers.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein numerical scores are used in the evaluation data of the information seller and information buyer and wherein statistical methods are used for processing of evaluation data.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of facilitating a transaction payment comprises providing clearing house services for financials of the marketplace.

6. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of connecting information sellers and information buyers to communicate offers and communicate acceptance comprises facilitating negotiation for a price for an information product.

7. The method of claim 3 wherein the act of making weighted evaluation data available comprises presenting data in graphs.

8. The method of claim 1 wherein the act of collecting evaluation data from the information seller and information buyer on qualities of interest comprises collecting scores on evaluation scales from the group consisting of: price setting, timeliness of delivery and fairness of service.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein the evaluation data results in a rank system with scores that aid pricing judgments of participating buyers and sellers.

10. The method of claim 1 wherein the act of collecting evaluation data comprises collecting scores on evaluation scales to evaluate a seller from the group consisting of: duration of handling, importance of the subject matter to buyer, results, usefulness, gain of information and fulfilment of personal expectations.

11. The method of claim 1 wherein the act of collecting evaluation data comprises collecting scores on evaluation scales to evaluate a buyer from the group consisting of: accuracy of problem definition and extent of supplied background information.

12. The method of claim 3 wherein the act of processing the evaluation data under a weighting scheme and making the weighted evaluation data available to participating sellers and buyers comprises processing the past history of a buyer or seller with respect to: the number and scope of previous sales transactions within the network, their distribution in time and scores provided as part of evaluation data.

13. The method of claim 1 further comprising the steps of enrolling of information product marketplace sellers and buyers, administrating the connecting between sellers and buyers, and

calculating an administrative fee based on the fees of a seller in an information product transaction.

14. The method of claim 1 further comprising compiling in a data base: sales transaction identification data, data defining the times for executing development and delivery of an information product, evaluation data comprising rank marks and order marks of buyers and sellers and the rules for at least one weighting scheme for evaluation data .

15. The method of claim 1 wherein the price of an information product is determined at least in part by evaluation data for past transactions, and favourable evaluation data for a buyer tends to reduce the price paid to the seller.

16. The method of claim 1 wherein the price of an information product is determined at least in part by evaluation data for past transactions, and favourable evaluation data for a seller tends to increase the price paid to the seller.

17. The method of claim 1 wherein the price of an information product is determined at least in part by evaluation data for past transactions, and favourable evaluation data for both a seller and a buyer tends to reduce the remuneration to a marketplace operator.

18. The method of claim 1 wherein the evaluation data include numerical scores and a statistical method is used to develop marks, said method comprising development with constant or linear-cyclic trend and equally or normally distributed variation.

19. The method of claim 1 wherein the evaluation data include numerical scores and a statistical development method is used to develop at least one of order marks or rank marks, said development method comprising no decay and unitary weightings with constant or linear-cyclic trend and equally or normally distributed variation.

20. The method of claim 1 wherein the evaluation data include numerical scores and a statistical development method is used to develop at least one of order marks or rank marks, said development method comprising a linear annual decay and a constant or linear-cyclic trend with equally or normally distributed variation.

21. The method of claim 1 wherein the evaluation data include numerical scores and a statistical development method is used to develop at least one of order marks or rank marks, said development method comprising an exponential annual decay with constant or linear-cyclic trend and equally or normally distributed variation.

22. The method of claim 1 wherein the evaluation data include numerical scores and a statistical development method is used to develop at least one of order marks or rank marks, said development method comprising a trigonometric annual decay with constant or linear-cyclic trend and equally or normally distributed variation.

23. The method of claim 1 wherein the evaluation data include numerical scores and a statistical development method is used to develop at least one of order marks or rank marks, said development method comprising a root-extension decay with constant or linear-cyclic trend and equally or normally distributed variation.

24. The method of claim 1 wherein the evaluation data include numerical scores and a statistical development method is used to develop at least one of order marks or rank marks, said development method comprising an arc-tangent extension decay with constant or linear-cyclic trend and equally or normally distributed variation.

25. The method of claim 1 wherein a statistical method is selected for computing rank marks for an evaluated buyer or seller that keeps the computing expenditure for development of such marks approximately constant despite increasing numbers of transactions and resulting order marks for the buyer or seller.

26. A computer program product comprising:

a computer usable medium and computer readable program code embodied on said computer readable medium for operating a marketplace for trading in information products between information sellers and information buyers, the computer readable code comprising:

computer readable program code configured to connect information sellers and information buyers to communicate offers and communicate acceptance of offers for trading in information products;

computer readable program code configured, for a trading transaction entered into, to facilitate at least one transaction payment between the information seller and information buyer in such transaction;

computer readable program code configured, for a trading transaction at least partly performed, to collect evaluation data from the information seller and information buyer on qualities of interest to future participants in the marketplace who may enter into information product transactions with such information seller and information buyer; and

computer readable program code configured to process the evaluation data under a weighting scheme and to make the weighted evaluation data available to participating sellers and buyers.

27. A computer system for operating a marketplace for trading in information products between information sellers and information buyers, comprising:

a component that connects information sellers and information buyers to communicate offers and communicate acceptance of offers for trading in information products;

a component that, for a trading transaction entered into, facilitates at least one transaction payment between the information seller and information buyer in such transaction;

a component that, for a trading transaction at least partly performed, collects evaluation data from the information seller and information buyer on qualities of interest to future participants in the marketplace who may enter into transactions with such information seller and information buyer; and

a component that processes the evaluation data under a weighting scheme and makes the weighted evaluation data available to participating sellers and buyers.

28. The system of claim 27 wherein the information buyer and seller in a sales transaction are anonymous to each other and known to a marketplace operator.

29. The system of claim 27 wherein numerical scores are used in the evaluation data of the information seller and information buyer.

30. The system of claim 27 wherein statistical methods are used in the component that processes evaluation data.

31. A method of facilitating transactions between buyers and sellers of information products comprising:

receiving from a potential buyer a proposal for an information product purchase;

communicating to at least one potential seller the potential buyer's proposal for an information product purchase, together with an associated buyer profile file;

receiving from at least one potential seller a proposal for an information product sale corresponding to the potential buyer's proposal for an information product purchase;

communicating to the potential buyer the at least one corresponding sale proposal together with an associated seller profile file;

facilitating formation of a contract between the potential buyer and at least one potential seller and payment in accordance with that contract; and

for a purchase facilitated by the method, collecting from the buyer information on its experience with the seller involved in the purchase and using such information to update the seller profile file and collecting from said seller information on its experience with the buyer involved in the purchase and using such information to update the buyer profile file.

32. The method of claim 31 wherein the information product involves development work and the contract formed involves milestones to measure progress of completion of development work.

33. The method of claim 31 wherein the step of communicating a buyer profile file comprises communicating information about the buyer's problem definition ability as experienced by prior sellers dealing with this buyer.

34. The method of claim 31 wherein the step of communicating a seller profile file comprises communicating information about the quality of a seller's information products as experienced by prior buyers dealing with this seller.

35. The method claim 31 wherein at least one of the seller information profile and the buyer information profile do not include name or other specific identification of the potential seller seller or buyer.

36. The method of claim 31 wherein the step of facilitating formation of a contract comprises presenting to the buyer and seller a menu of form contracts for purchase of an information product.

37. The method of claim 36 wherein the menu of form contracts includes contracts with different risk allocation provisions, allocating a greater or lesser degree of risk to buyer or seller.

38. The method of claim 31 further comprising the step of providing contract administration services to the parties for monitoring the performance of the agreement against agreed milestones.

39. The method of claim 38 wherein the step of providing contract administration service comprises providing milestone reminders to at least one of buyer and seller in accordance with agreed milestones.

40. The method of claim 38 wherein the step of providing contract administration services comprises providing milestone audits of seller performance against milestone criteria.

41. The method of claim 31 wherein the step of collecting from the buyer information on its experience with the seller involved in the purchase comprises collecting information responsive to criteria from the group comprising duration of handling, timeliness of delivery and usefulness of information product delivered.

42. The method of claim 41 wherein the step of collecting from the buyer information on its experience with the seller involved in the purchase comprising collecting information based on predefined rating scales.

43. The method of claim 31 wherein the step of collecting from said seller information on its experience with the buyer involved in the purchase comprises collecting information responsive to criteria from the group comprising skill in problem definition and extent of the supplied background information.

44. The method of claim 43 wherein the step of collecting from the seller information on its experience with the buyer involved in the purchase comprises collecting scores based on predefined rating scales.

45. A method of facilitating transactions between buyers and sellers of information products comprising:
receiving from a potential seller a proposal for an information product sale;
communicating to a potential buyer the potential seller's proposal for an information product sale, together with an associated seller profile file;
receiving from a potential buyer a proposal for an information product purchase corresponding to the potential seller's proposal for an information product sale;
communicating to the potential seller the corresponding purchase proposal together with an associated buyer profile file;
facilitating formation of a contract between the potential seller and at least one potential buyer and payment in accordance with that contract; and

for a purchase facilitated by the method, collecting from the buyer information on its experience with the seller involved in the purchase and using such information to update the seller profile file and collecting from said seller information on the buyer involved in the purchase and using such information to update the buyer profile file.

46. A computer program product comprising:

a computer usable medium and computer readable program code embodied on said computer readable medium for operating a marketplace for sale of information products between information sellers and information buyers, the computer readable code comprising:

computer readable program code configured to receive from a potential buyer a proposal for an information product;

computer readable program code configured to communicate to at least one potential seller the potential buyer's proposal for an information product, together with an associated buyer profile file;

computer readable program code configured to receive from at least one potential seller a proposal for an information product sale corresponding to the potential buyer's proposal for an information product;

computer readable program code configured to communicate to the potential buyer the at least one corresponding sale proposal together with an associated seller profile file;

computer readable program code configured to facilitate formation of a contract between the potential buyer and at least one potential seller and payment in accordance with that contract; and

computer readable program code configured, for a purchase facilitated by the method, to collect from the buyer information on its experience with the seller involved in the contract and using such information to update the seller profile file and collecting from said seller information on its experience with the buyer involved in the contract and using such information to update the buyer profile file.